



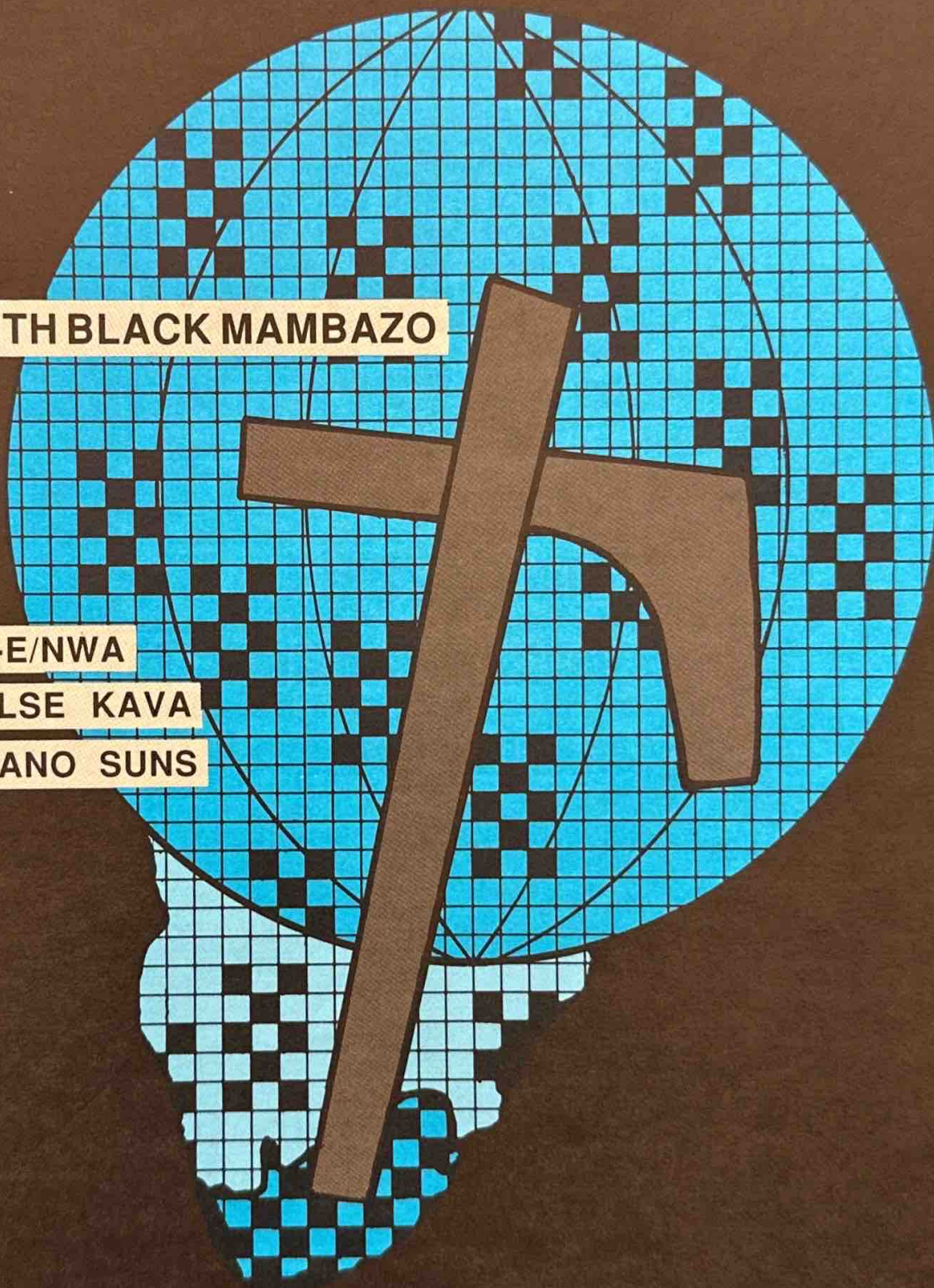
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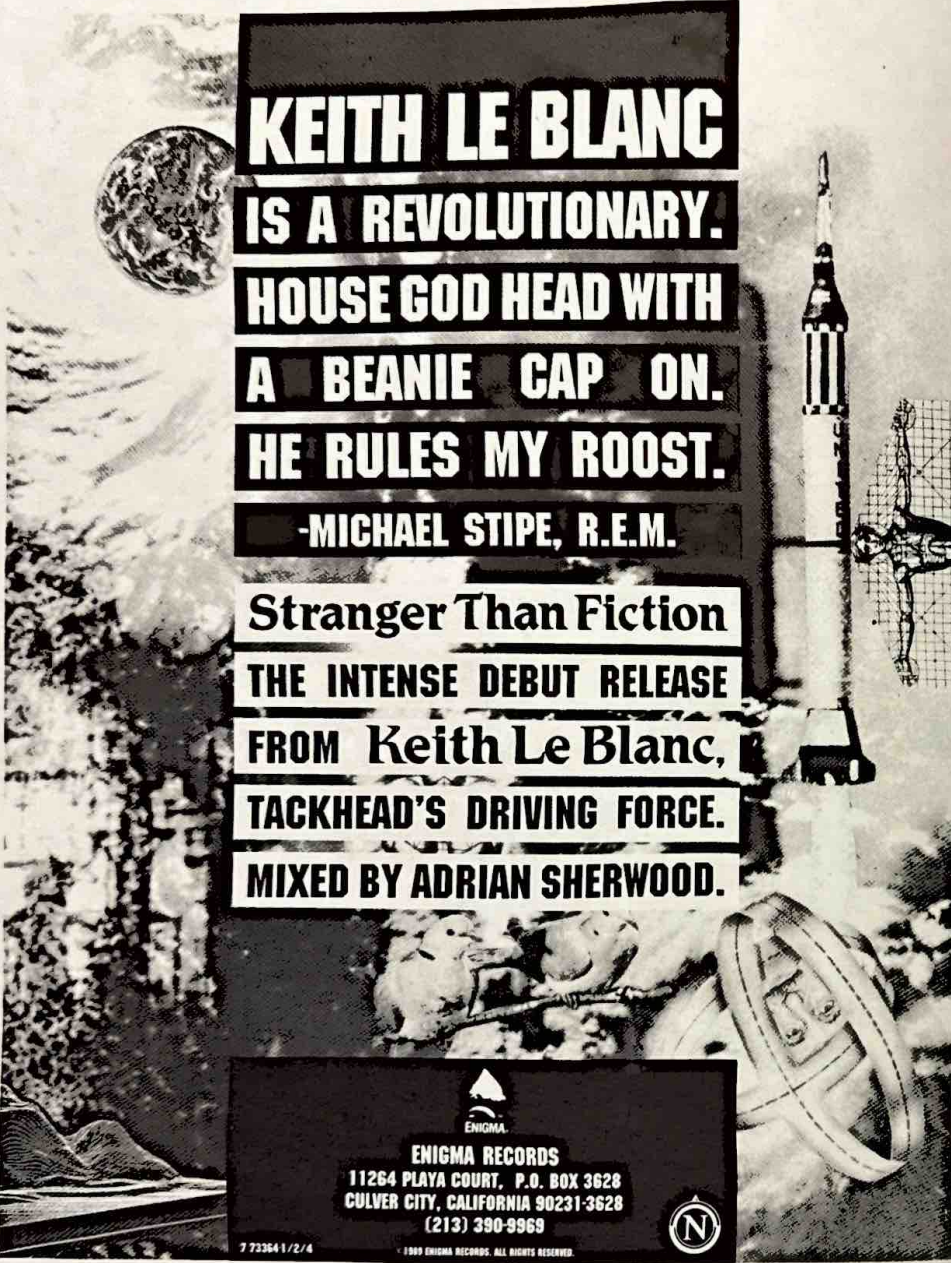
LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO

EAZY-E/NWA

REPULSE KAVA

VOLCANO SUNS



A large, stylized black and white photograph of Keith Le Blanc, the lead singer of Tackhead, is the background for the left page. He is wearing a beanie and a jacket, looking directly at the camera. The text is overlaid on this image in white boxes.

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WHPK MAGAZINE

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PUNK ROCK, POP SHIT

Repulse Kava has been around for over two years, but you've probably heard very little about them. Rotating drummers and technical problems at just about every show they've ever played have kept the band from garnering a sizeable audience, in spite of the fact that the noises they've been making around town reduce almost any other local act to lame rehashings of stale formulas. Although occasionally compared to 70's progressive-rock outfits like Rush and King Crimson, Bill DeLeonardis' jazz-influenced bass lines recall the Minutemen and Tar Babies, while Craig White's over-the-edge guitar playing creates a wall of noise reminiscent of Dinosaur Jr. and Phantom Tollbooth. John Seden sings while coaxing incidental noise from his slide guitar and turntables, and Bob Rising, the newest addition to the group, pounds out the often changing tempos and meters over which the rest of the band wails. **WHPK's Bundy K. Brown and Mark Ferguson** spoke to the band on two separate occasions; what follows is a distillation of these meetings.

BD: The first incarnation of the band was John and me, getting together with the intention of making noise, in late '86.

JS: We met at the Art Institute. He was wearing a Sonic Youth T-shirt, or something like that. At first, we wanted to be more like Skeleton Crew — my original intentions were to play with the turntables in this sort of loosely structured improv, and Bill was going to play bass and guitar. But we turned into this rock band.

BD: We got this wacky guitarist and percussionist. Our first drum set was a snare, a cowbell, and a quacker. We didn't have a cymbal — we had this school bell, and the bass drum pedal was really this air thing you would step on, so

we hooked it up to a duck call.

JS: It was so annoying: quack, ding, quack, ding ... That was all you could play on it.

BD: Then John and I decided to get serious, so we put an ad in the paper, and we got Craig. At that point, we were a six-piece, but John, Craig and I were getting more into the band, and John the other guitarist, Chris the percussionist, and Cary the drummer were getting more into art school. So they kind of faded away and we moved out of the loft we were practicing in and got Craig Bradford, who is now drumming for God's Acre. We ended up going through a number of drummers. Virus X, who is a friend of ours, helped us out for a while; then we had Andy, who runs Landmind Underground, and finally we ended up putting another ad in the paper and got Bob, from Snaketrain.

WHPK: How did you get hooked up with Butt Rag Records?

BD: Butt Rag Records, the conglomerate? Pete came to our first show at Batteries (Not Included) ...

CW: ... and we discovered him.

BD: We discovered him crouching in a corner, shooting up. So he kept with us, and one day I went and talked to him about putting up half the money for a record.

WHPK: And this was after you were on the Butt Rag compilation tape?

BD: Yeah. It sold out 200 copies in something like three days. It went really well ... yeah, we were on that. Those are really hard to get.

JS: That never came out; we were supposed to be on it, but it was scrapped for our single. He (Pete) just seemed to really like us a lot — he saw us open for Phantom Tollbooth, and has stuck with us

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ON THE GANGSTA TIP

Eazy-E and NWA have bum rushed the boundaries of what is acceptable in rap, with their ruthless descriptions of life (and death) in Compton, California. Their hardcore realism, while moving them up the charts, has left them unacknowledged by mainstream media. The assault continues with their recent lp's — Eazy-E's *Eazy-Duz-It* and NWA's *Straight Outta Compton*. WHPK's Chilly Q, J.P. Chill, and Icebox spoke with NWA's Ice Cube and MC Ren, and later with Eazy-E, after they cold-rocked Chicago in January.

Part One: Ice and Ren

Q: NWA has a new album coming out?
Ice: It's called *Straight Outta Compton*.
Q: What's the difference between Eazy-E and NWA?
Ren: NWA's like an all-star group. Eazy's part of NWA but he does solo records on his own. We're all like one family.
Q: But on Eazy-E's record, I hear you rapping.
Ren: Yeah, on one cut, just for the pub.
Ice: When we say Eazy-E does an album on his own, it doesn't mean he leaves the group. We help him with that. We collaborate. Just because he does an album on his own doesn't mean he's by himself, so it's like our project too.
Ren: Maybe in the future we'll do a solo project and then he might be a guest on our album.
JP: What were you doing before you were in NWA?
Ren: I wasn't doing records.
Ice: I was with a group called CIA. We did one record.
JP: On Kru-Cuts Records?
Ice: Yeah, on Kru-Cuts. We like to keep that quiet, but, yeah, I was with 'em, man, bet, but it

was like I was the only one motivated as far as rap goes.

Q: Where did everyone else come from?

Ice: Dr. Dre and DJ Yella, from the World Class Wrecking Crew. Ren was just the rawest nigger on the street. Ice Cube was from CIA, and Eazy-E wasn't with no group. He was with the street thing and kinda got with the rap.

Q: People want to know if you're all ruthless gangsters or criminals.

Ren: It's like this. Sometimes when we do songs we're talking through other niggers out in the street. Like saying what we saw another brother going through — we just say the shit. A brother, if you say something real, they can go by that better than if it's something fake like "I Need Love."

Ice: Like in "Gangsta, Gangsta," I ain't never been to prison, so it's like I'm the brother that's gettin' out. Some brothers, when they're sent to the penitentiary, have the attitude like they're just the baddest motherfucker on earth. And I'm taking that attitude. And what are they calling me when I take that attitude? A gangster. They don't give a fuck, they'll kill you, man.

Ren: There's a lot of brothers that don't give a fuck.

Ice: About nothin'.

Q: When you got together as NWA, which stands for...

Ren and Ice: "Niggers With Attitudes."

Q: Last time you gave us six different titles.

Ice: We wasn't saying it, because we wanted people to be curious. Like Eazy, how old is Eazy? It creates curiosity; it brings our name up.

Q: When you got together as NWA, did you expect this success?

Ice: Ren wasn't with us when we did the original track. We took what happened to "Boyz in the Hood" into consideration. We couldn't see it because we weren't there. It was a big record. So we went and did NWA with that same attitude — you know, fuck the radio. That was our attitude but somehow a radio song got slipped in there. You know we're talking about "Panic Zone."

JP: Why was that on the single?

Ice: Well, it was Arabian Prince. He ain't with the group no more. When you hear all them raw cuts and then you hear "Panic Zone," it's more like "What the fuck? It's soft as a..." It didn't fit us well. Dre did it as a friend [of Arabian Prince], and plus, people on the West Coast listen to that shit. And it kind of helped us sell but real brothers don't like shit like that or "something to dance to."

Ren: They did that one in like 30 minutes.

Ice: Ice Cube was not present; I was in Phoenix. A lot of people like the record, but we'll never do it in concert.

JP: Are you touring regularly with Ice-T?

Ren: We're supposed to go on a tour with Ice-T in May.

Ice: We're doing a few spots now to keep us from starving. But we'll be doing a nationwide tour in May, and hopefully, a little Europe thing along with it, but I don't know how our record's doing in Europe.

Q: What's the deal with Ice-T? How did that come about?

Ice: Ice-T's a cool brother, man, and we attract the same type of crowd. It'd be stupid to put us with JJ Fad or Jazzy Jeff because the people there will bring their little kids and they'll be shocked. So that's why we're with Ice-T. They know what to expect — something raw — plus, our crews get along. And Ice-T gets ill a little on stuff like "Drama," he breaks it down.

Ren: You've got to listen to what he's sayin'.

Ice: Us, we do it raw, straight. Take it how you want to — do it or don't do it. Fuck it, because here it is, here's how it happened. Ice-T, he'll say that and then he'll back it up, like "Yeah, I'm livin' like this, man," and he'll say, not "don't do it" but "it ain't cool." He says, pay attention to what happens when you do stuff like this, the consequences.

JP: Who did you listen to before you were in NWA? Everything we used to get from L.A. was wack.

Ren: Because in your mind, it had to be wack.

Q: Just drop the needle and hear if it's wack.

Ren: Everything that had been coming out of L.A. was fucked up. I think it's like this, man. Because of the gangs out there, because of how the gangs got worse, that made niggers start rapping better. Because before the gang shit wasn't so bad, niggers didn't have nothing to do but make fast beats and talk through those little boxes. Then it got bad, where you can't go outside. You'd be like, damn, this is crazy, so you start writing what you see, writing what you do. You're talking real shit and niggers want to hear that.

Q: You talk about Compton a lot. Tell us about Compton.

Ren: Compton is wild, man. It's like you can't even stand outside. There's people riding by in Compton with guns, shooting, daylight, nighttime. Your mama can't water the grass, whatever. You got to just constantly watch your back. There's people out there that's crazy. And the police, they just fuck with you 'cause they think you're part of a gang, but if you ain't part of a gang... I got shot being in the wrong place at the wrong time, that's how it is. If you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, you can get fucked up. The shit is serious. Niggers think it's funny, but it ain't. And it ain't only Compton. It's Watts, South Central L.A. They've got the biggest drive-by shootings going on. Every night on the news, you hear

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The police,
they just
fuck with you
'cause they
think you're
part of a gang.



GANGSTA

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about somebody gettin' took out.

Ice: All right, it's like when you're from the ghetto, you're probably from a broken home and all that and your mother probably worked all the time. She ain't got no time to care for you, so the only family you got is the gang. They're always out there.

Ren: There are a lot of motherfuckers that got money who are in gangs. They're trying to be with the other niggers.

Ice: Some people just want to fit in and some, that's their only alternative. And they take the shit serious.

Ren: Like when I was younger, I was ten to run with these brothers. I wanted to be with 'em but then when I got with 'em and saw how they was, I was like, "This ain't me to be going around, just shootin' brothers for nothing. It ain't working,

man, gettin' shot over colors.

Q: ~~You talk about the gangs and gangbangers. What do they think of your music?~~

Ren: They love it.

Ice: They like it because it's real. OK, we ain't in a gang, but we're cool with them. We're cool with anybody. Any brother, if he's making money, if he's trying to make money, if he's trying to better himself and move forward, we ain't against that.

Ren: It's like power, they'll listen to us or Ice-T before they'll listen to anybody else because they know we know how it is.

Ice: All we want to do is express reality.

Q: *You definitely express reality, but what a grim reality.*

Ice: It's grim, man, that's the only way we see it.

Ren: If you're out there, you got to go out with the attitude like you're going to jail. Like the first person that says something to me, I'm

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GANGSTA

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gonna bust him in his face. If you don't...

Ice: You'll get punked.

JP: Do you get any opposition from people who object to your shows?

Ice: If the kids are getting wild — because the music doesn't cause the kids to riot — it's kids being with kids. It's just going to be a problem wherever you're at. You get too many people together, they're gonna fight — at a Bears game, whatever. So, they can drag us off stage, saying we're obscene, but that might start a riot.

Q: Who does what?

Ice: Ice Cube, MC Ren and Eazy-E, we write the rhymes. We write our parts or other people's parts. Dr. Dre and DJ Yella, they produce, they hook the beats up and we come together and kick it out. We each rap lead vocal, like I rap lead vocal on "Dope Man." A lot of people don't know that. MC Ren raps lead vocals on "Ruthless Villain" and "Quiet on the Set."

JP: Why did you leave Macola Records?

Ice: We did "Dope Man" and "Eight Ball" and never got paid for it. If you don't get paid, you got to go. We've got him in court. We'll get paid eventually.

Q: You're talking about Don McMillan?

Ice: Right. Don McMillan, Macola Records. He's a rat. Anybody that wants to make a record, go another way; that ain't the way to go.

Part Two: Eazy-E

Q: Your new album's out and you appear to be rolling.

E: The album's on the charts. It went gold in three weeks without airplay, with a little help from you and the streets, word of mouth.

Q: And you say you did it for the kids?

E: Yeah, I did the radio versions, all the songs got radio versions for the little kids. They're gettin' in the Walgreens, the K-Mart's, whatever. It's for the little kids so they can buy the album. And then all the songs are getting played on the radio now.

Q: We know where everybody else came from. How did you get started?

E: I was starting off with my own record company. I was doing a whole lot with other groups.

Q: Like what other groups?

E: I wouldn't mention them, but, some other groups. So I was gettin' my record company rolling and Dr. Dre said, "Why don't you go on and rap?" I said, I ain't never rapped in my life. So the first record I ever did was "Boyz in the Hood." I used to be a DJ — me and Dre. So really, Dre got me started into everything. The record took off, it was doing good and there was demand for another record and then an album. I said, if I can make the extra money doing something myself, do it.

Q: So you had no idea that any of this was going to happen.

E: No, it was like, man, it ain't gonna work. Then we put the record out and everybody on the streets liked it. Then the radio wanted it, so I went into the studio and cut the radio version. In L.A., the shit was like Number One for five weeks.

Q: Are you from Compton?

E: Yeah, of course.

Q: So did you put together NWA?

E: When we first started NWA, it was me, Ice Cube and Dre. All of us formed it together. Ren was gonna do his own album, then we put him in NWA. Then we got Yella and now we're rollin'.

Q: Where do you see yourself going in the future — toward the street side or the radio side?

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SHIT

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ever since.

WHPK: Speaking of Phantom Tollbooth, John, was your appearance on their first album just a one-off sort of thing?

JS: I grew up with Dave and Jerry of Tollbooth. In high school there was this band, the Four Noses, and I was kind of like the fifth nose. I played saxophone and made incidental noise. After they broke up, we worked on a few songs when they were in a pre-Tollbooth stage, and when they recorded the album they asked if I wanted to come down and do it with them.

WHPK: In a lot of ways, I think, in terms of what's happening in music now, Phantom Tollbooth come closest to the sort of thing you're doing.

BR: I think we're like Yes meets Grandmaster Flash, or something.

BD: I don't know, all the stuff we like is so varied and different. We all like hardcore, punk rock, Pere Ubu, Ronald Shannon Jackson, Bill Frisell, John Zorn, Sonny Sharrock, even some pop shit. One of my favorite bands is the Raspberries. A lot of our newer stuff is more straight ahead.

WHPK: About the turntable manipulations — do you consider yourself influenced by people like Christian Marclay and Steve Fisk?

JS: When I was living in New York, Dave Rick and I used to go to these things down in Alphabet City — I guess it was John Zorn's apartment — and he would have these little improv things. You would see Frith and Christian Marclay and some jazz guy. I don't know too much about jazz, but these guys would be playing stand-up bass or something, and it was amazing, just free improv. I saw Christian Marclay there a hell of a lot, so he was definitely an influence — that's where I got the idea for the sticker dots. I used to play with records all the time as a kid, spinning them backwards and playing with the speed. I've been kind of into analog, as opposed to digital sampling, like Steve Fisk.

WHPK: When will the new single be out?

JS: March. We've already sent the tapes off. With the first single, it was like this learning thing for us, since none of us had ever done it before. We had it done really cheap at this place in Missouri where they did everything, and we accepted the first test pressing they sent us.

BD: For some reason, it didn't sound that bad.

CW: We were so rushed by other people, we were behind in getting it out. They were already sold before we got them.

BD: Plus the order was fucked up. We were supposed to get colored vinyl and they gave us black, and the distributors were waiting. This one will sound better, though.

JS: We're having it mastered at K-Disc, who does a lot of SST stuff, among other things, and then we'll take the master and have it pressed at another place.

BD: The new single will showcase our more melodic pop style — the a-side at least, but the b-side will be Kava onslaught-crap. I think sometimes it falls into cliché heavy metal, in a weird way.

CW: You have to hear it to judge it. Bill has been getting more into pop lately, but I've been trying to experiment more. I've written songs in a standard sort of way for so long, with regular chords and scales, that I'm trying to experiment with the whole style of what we're doing. If it bothers people, too bad.

BD: Craig and I are just moving in opposite directions. He's doing more of what I was doing before and I'm doing what he used to be doing. I was worried that we were just stringing riffs together into songs. I wanted to move more towards a straight-ahead kind of style with more melodic vocals.

BR: I'm into skiffle.

BD: Bob's into skiffing. Actually, Bob writes songs too, but I can't get him to give us any of his good songs.

WHPK: When you went into the studio to cut the single, you recorded more songs. Will there be an album out soon?

JS: No, it's just going to be a demo tape. What happened was that Bill was an intern at this studio, so we got free time.

BD: We went in there on weekends and did it on an eight-track. Some of the stuff I like, some of it I don't like.

BR: It's the performance.

JS: No, it's the production, because what happened is, as we were finishing up the basic tracks, the studio went bankrupt, and we began to run out of time. So as we were mixing it down, we all figured, whether we like it or not, we're going to have to be happy with this. So we decided to concentrate on doing two tracks really well for the single, and then making a demo tape with the rest. And as a demo tape, it's good, because we've got stuff like backing vocals and layered guitars and effects that you couldn't do on a four track or boom box.

BD: We're shopping the tape around to different labels. We've sent it to Sub Pop, SST, and Homestead. Pete wants us to send the tape to Shimmy Disc, too. The thing is, I'd like to get on a label that's going to pay for us to go back into the studio.

WHPK: It'd probably be easier if you fit into a more easily definable genre of music.

BD: Punk rock, pop shit — I don't know what kind of music you would call us.

CW: Original circus core.

GANGSTA

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E: Who, me? Man, I ain't sellin' out. Everybody else be sellin' out, like the Fat Boys don't "Louie, Louie." And Run-DMC, they sold out tryin' to cross over, but that ain't me. I ain't goin' out like no sucker.

Q: Just for the record, what's your real age?

E: No more questions. No, it's like a mystery: I'm gonna have this big giveaway: whoever can guess my age, I'll give them a couple of thousand dollars. You only get one try and we can't have anybody going 15, 16, 17 ... no, none of that.

Q: Would you say this has been difficult for you or has it been a cakewalk?

E: I'd say a cakewalk.

Q: So you don't have any stories of hunger and homelessness.

E: No, none of that. I come from a broken home ... no.

JP: What do you think of the Stop the Violence Movement's record, "Self-Destruction"?

E: It's probably cool; to each his own. I haven't heard it yet but I would like to hear it to see what it's talkin' about.

Icebox: Is NWA gonna do a video soon?

E: We're supposed to be making a video, "Parental Discretion Advised." Right now, it's a street song but we gotta make it for the radio, so it can be played on TV and the radio. But it's real cool. It's something like Parliament stuff.

Q: I heard Rufus Thomas was looking for you. (A number of Eazy-E's songs use samples from Rufus Thomas' records.)

E: What do you mean? He got his — I didn't steal anything.

Q: We're just messing with you.

JP: Do you see yourself moving into political things, like Schoolly-D? He started off with nothing political at all, and then on his last album, he's sampling H. Rapp Brown.

E: No, I don't think so ... I don't know. I don't know what's coming in the future.

Q: How has this changed your life?

E: No big change, really. I mean, the only change in it is that it's legal. 'Cause the shit I was doing before was that other thing, you know, selling drugs.

Q: So it's a way out?

E: Yeah, a way out.

Q: We won't print that that's what financed your record company.

E: I don't care.

Q: Cause then kids will go, "I'm gonna do like Eazy-E, man..."

E: No, I'm not a role model so don't try to be like me. I ain't nobody to look up to. I just tell 'em, all the shit I talked about happened or could happen.

THE BLACK AX FROM LADYSMITH

by Marta Nicholas
and
Dagfinn von Bretzel



† To most hearers of Paul Simon's album *Graceland*, the black South African singing ensemble Ladysmith Black Mambazo was a revelation as well as a pleasure. This was a new sound — a lush blend of male voices quite different from the African music making the rounds here in recent years (mostly West African: e.g., Fela, King Sunny Ade, Youssou N'Dour). In fact it was something of an earopener to many white South Africans who

had never really listened to this marvelous music in their own backyard — automatically putting down every aspect of the lives of the majority of the population in that nation ruled by *apartheid*.

But, as Joseph Shabalala (composer, director, and lead singer of the ten-man group) mentions in the following interview, this music has been there all the time. Shabalala's personal style and skill has definitely carried it to new heights, but the musical tradition (not only the sound but also the accompanying body

movements) that Ladysmith Black Mambazo presents so beautifully has a history going back more than half a century.

Its background includes a complex blending of the music and action of the 19th-century American minstrel shows that toured South Africa (they were called *isikhunzi*, "coon"), plus later ragtime, into various traditional Zulu styles of singing and dancing. Having within their own traditions some of the most highly developed forms of African vocal

polyphony, the Zulus added into the hopper the four-part harmonies of the hymns taught them by the missionaries in the Christian schools. (Some Zulu songs are sung in unison, however, as is the case with most of the music of the African continent. African rhythmic complexity being the counterpart of Western harmonic complexity.)

Even before 1900, schools had formed their own music troupes; former students put together choirs which traveled to the migrant labor sites, passing the

music to men who then took it back to their own towns and villages and often formed their own choirs. From 1930 on, there has been a constant stream of new groups — singing for themselves and their buddies in the mines and factories, an important form of working-class identity. There is also often the wider arena of competitions — in many places occurring weekly and lasting all night, with as many as a couple dozen or more of these all-male groups participating.

Although part of the reputation of any particular group is in its visual

appearance (dance movements and attire), the singing is the essence — not only the singing style, but also the words. Following the musical traditions of the Zulus (and in fact most sub-Saharan African peoples), songs are usually about the conditions of the society: what was (historical tales), what is (general observations about life as well as comments about specific issues and events — including political), what *could or should be* (the rules and expectations of that society, advice and admonitions, and religious themes).

The important ideas transmitted by the songs in this particular style have reached not only large live audiences but also radio listeners (on the South African Broadcasting Service programs intended for the blacks — though the political commentary songs have been censored since the late 1940s) and on records, which have been available since 1930. And so too the various musical developments have spread, been picked up by other groups, and developed further. *Mbube* ("Lion", the name of an early popular song in the style) is still used as the general term for this usually a *cappella* genre, but other names came to be used for particular variations as they arose: a high-pitched yelling style of the 1940s called *isikumbula* ("gambling") or *isikhwela*, Joe ("Attack, Joe!", a specific song) got dubbed *ibombing* after the war, referring to the sounds of exploding bombs; in the 1960s *cothoza miana* ("Walk steadily, boys", again the name of a specific piece) became the common term for Zulu male choral singing; *isicathamiya* ("walk softly") refers to the faster-tempo, structurally innovative style such as that of Joseph Shabalala.

Of the many talented South African black musicians available now on recordings in the USA, Ladysmith Black Mambazo has attracted the most attention and the largest following in this country. Joseph Shabalala founded the group in 1965, having begun his own musical career by singing, from 1958-60, with the Durban Choir, and then with his uncle's group The Highlanders. Ladysmith Black Mambazo's first radio appearance was in 1967; their first album was issued in 1973.

Shabalala — who composes all their songs and himself sings the lead (soprano), as well as choreographing all their movements and directing them in general — has an exquisite instinct for melody, harmony, balance, and rhythm (not only of the instant but also of the progression of the whole). Though few here are in a position to appreciate his "new narrative style that combines poetic sensitivity with deep metaphorical Zulu" (liner notes of *Mbube Roots*; see

discography below), the musical features of his presentation easily cross cultural boundaries. Plus, he has been throwing in explanatory bits for English-speaking audiences since the exposure through *Graceland*.

Anyone attending a live performance of Ladysmith Black Mambazo (or even just seeing them on television — recently, even on a 7-Up ad) certainly can appreciate the wonderful theatrical presence of Joseph Shabalala and his group. In fact, though probably few in the audience even suspect it, given the very laid-back and improvisatory impression the singers make (especially Mr. Shabalala himself in his physical and vocal wanderings amongst the others on the stage), he is exercising extremely skillful control over every musical and choreographic moment. Yet backstage, though he is enthusiastic about his music and what the group does, the man is incredibly quiet, sweet, and gentle. He seems genuinely unassuming — not at all affected by all the hubbub of being "discovered", except in his appreciation of its offer of more opportunity to share something he loves, the essence of his being — his music.

Dagfinn von Bretzel, who was an exchange student in South Africa in 1987 and whose weekly WHPK program, "Third-World Sound System" (Thursdays, 5-5:30 pm), consists mostly of current pop music of Southern Africa: Kwaku Larbey, from Ghana, host of "Rendezvous Africa" (Fridays, 7-8 pm), which features pop music from all over the continent; and Marta Nicholas, host of "Music Around the World" (Thursdays, 5:30-7 pm), which includes all kinds of musics from all over Africa, spoke with Joseph Shabalala — composer, lead voice, choreographer, and director of Ladysmith Black Mambazo — on October 29, 1988, before the group's concert in the University of Chicago's Mandel Hall.

MN: What does the name "Ladysmith Black Mambazo" mean?

JS: "Ladysmith" is our town where we were born. "Black": that refers to a span of oxen because on the farm we use oxen to plow, to cultivate the field; there are three kinds of span — black, red, and colored — and I chose those black ones because they are strongest. "Mambazo" is an ax, a chopping ax. I wish the group to pave the way with their voices. So it's Ladysmith Black Mambazo: "Black Ax from Ladysmith," we can say.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

THE BLACK AX FROM LADYSMITH

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

MN: "Pave the way" to what?

JS: Pave the way with their voices — to sing well, sing nicely as they do now.

DB: Did that name come from the competitions that you won in your home territory?

JS: Yes, I first said we had a "black ax" because we used to win those competitions.

KL: How often does your group go outside South Africa to sing? Do you go to sing in other African countries?

JS: We sang all over Southern Africa. Then we began to go abroad — in 1981, to West Germany.

MN: Have you ever gone to West Africa or Central Africa?

JS: No, we've never gone to West Africa. I remember that we got the invitation, but we didn't go there. I don't know why; it's up to the promoters.

MN: Who do you think of your music being for? Is it really first for your people? Or do you nowadays think of the larger audience?

JS: Well, I think my music is for each and everybody. First I thought it was only for my people because I sing in the Zulu language. But then I discovered that the Sotho people love my music, so I started to compose a bit in Sotho, and in Venda. And then I discovered that even the white people like my songs, and so I started to compose a little bit in English. I think music is a universal language because even the person who doesn't understand the language enjoys the music.

KL: How does your composition "Homeless" [on *Graceland*] relate to your church music? I really like that song, and have used it on my program.

JS: Paul Simon came with that title and said I could use it if I liked it, and I decided it was a good title. When we were

growing up on the farm, we used to sing something with that idea: "We sleep in the cliffs or in caves" — similar to "homeless." That song suits everybody because there are people who have no house, have no home to sleep in, while others do have homes, big houses. But really our home is not here; our home is in heaven. We are all homeless. So this song is good for everybody.

DB: I've heard it interpreted as a somewhat political statement against the South African government: "We are homeless in our own country."

JS: A song is a gift. It comes from somewhere and then you use that song; and then people enjoy that song. They use it their own way once they have bought the record. You can't say "No, this song is not for that; it's for them to do as they like, their interpretation."

MN: Where does your song style come from? What did you add to the traditional way of singing to make your quite distinctive sound for your group?

JS: Ladysmith Black Mambazo music is born from traditional Zulu songs and dance, but my ears were always complaining that there was something missing there. Then this sound came to me; I assembled a group and taught them what I felt and what I heard. The sound came to me at night when I was sleeping. Then those who were singing for me just appeared and I started to see them. I followed what they did, even their actions; some actions I took from those children who were singing for me.

DB: Do you call that sound isicathamiya?

JS: Yes, we call our music that because in traditional Zulu dance we stamp the floor hard but when we do this style we touch the floor softly.

KL: In West Africa, you cannot be a Christian and still follow traditional customs, particularly in the church setting. In your home country, can you be a Christian and yet do traditional things; and if so, how do you combine them?

JS: That's a hard question. As I was growing up, I was not a Christian; I was called in 1975 to be a Christian. I was waiting for the Church leaders to keep me from going to the hall to dance. But there are spiritual songs (gospel) in this church; so they prayed for me, and then they came to me and said that the answer was that I must go and sing all over the world.

MN: I know you write the words of most of your songs. Do you also write all the melodies, and exactly what each voice is supposed to do?

— *Indestructible Beat of Soweto* (Shanachie 43044)

— *Rhythms of Resistance: The Music of South Africa* (Shanachie 43018; from a BBC documentary of the same name, which was Paul Simon's first exposure to the choir; several other groups too, including a rare ensemble of a white man and black man together)

— *Mbube Roots: Zulu Choral Music from South Africa, 1930s-1960s* (Rounder Records 5025. Has excellent detailed liner notes by Veit Erlmann, an ethnomusicologist at the Berlin Museum who has spent years in South Africa and was one of the first outsiders to know and appreciate Joseph Shabalala.

Information in the preceding introduction comes from those notes and the paper he presented at a Society for Ethnomusicology 1988 session on Ladysmith Black Mambazo — their music and the social, cultural, political, and economic ramifications of their collaboration with Paul Simon on *Graceland*.)

An additional suggestion:

— *Mbube: Zulu Men's Singing Competition* (Rounder Records 5023; an example of the multiple-choir gatherings mentioned in both text and interview above)

Also, keep an eye open for the imports of other ensembles who perform this style of music, especially The Holy Spirits, and the Soweto Teachers Choir.

Many of these recordings may be found at Dr. Wax Records in Hyde Park.



by Marta Nicholas and Daglinn von Bretzel

Ladysmith Black Mambazo has recorded more than two dozen albums since 1973. (Their first recorded song, "It is Mama," played on the radio in 1967, and was commercially released only on their third album, in 1974; this song is included on *Mbube Roots* — see below.) Of their many gold-winners, the following are most easily available in this country:

- *Journey of Dreams* (1988, Warner Brothers 25753)
- *Shaka Zulu* (1987, Warner Brothers 25582; produced by Paul Simon)
- *Inala* (1985 reissue, Shanachie 43040)
- *Induku Zethu* (1983 reissue, Shanachie 43021)
- *Umthombo Wamanzi* (1981 reissue, Shanachie 43055)
- *Ulwandle Olungewe* (1977 reissue, Shanachie 43030)

Ladysmith Black Mambazo also appears on:

— Paul Simon's *Graceland* (1986, Warner Brothers 25447-1. The group performs "Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes" and "Homeless"; there are also several other South African musicians on this album.)

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BLACK AX

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

JS: Yes.

MN: So each person sings the same thing each time? They don't improvise on their parts?

JS: When I teach them to sing, there are only four parts: alto, the high part; tenor; bass; and then I lead the song [soprano]. I depend on my ears to hear that this sound is good or that sound is wrong, which particular note each of the four voices will sing.

KL: Do you and the other members of your group have any formal education in music?

JS: No. In fact, people at home asked me to set up some sort of center to help them, because there are many people in South Africa who sing this type of music but they fail to get public attention. So I formed an association at home; I call it SATMA (South African Traditional Music Association). And here, too, in New York I formed another one called ATMA (African Traditional Music Association), trying to help each other about music. Until now, people have been trying to imitate my sound from records; some people would like me to teach them.

MN: Do you think you'll continue your musical style unchanged? Do you think other musics you hear — other African musics, American music — might influence your style?

JS: I don't know, but so far I've got many things in my mind — still ringing, still coming, those different sounds. Maybe I don't know. (chuckles)

DB: How do you see your newest album *Journey of Dreams* fitting into what you've done before? Do you feel that this album is different, that it has a particular message, a particular influence?

JS: I named it "Journey of Dreams" because to me it really feels like what came from the dream — the sound — exactly as it was. In this album there are several different kinds of sounds: the warrior song, traditional hymns, Zulu dance, *isicathamiya*.

KL: Your group is all men. Do you intend to ever add any women to it, and if not, why not?

JS: In this type of music, *isicathamiya*, there are very few groups that have girls. In male groups, they keep their voices low; the ladies have high voices. This type of music developed when our fathers were away from home, to work; they formed it because they were homesick. Ladies were not there; they used to sing together with ladies at home, but where they worked there were no ladies. And we've just continued that.

MN: How has your worldwide success affected you and the people in your group — as people?

JS: We're always talking about the way people welcome us. We're very happy because we are musicians, and we like people and we like to sing for everyone. We're very pleased with the welcomes everywhere.

MN: I notice on *Journey of Dreams*, there's a song about how some people are jealous: "Ungayoni into Enhle (Destroy Not This Beauty)". Does this mean that at home, some people are treating you badly on account of your success?

JS: It's very difficult to answer because I don't remember that on the record. But when we say "Destroy not this beauty," it's like all my compositions; we admonish, advise the people, like teaching — "Do not do this! Do not destroy this! The right thing is this way!" We like to share with the people our ideas, continuing a tradition of doing this in songs.

MN: What would you like to do in the future, in addition to performing and your new traditional-music associations? Do you want to continue touring in other countries?

JS: Yes, I like traveling. I like singing. I like teaching. I like composing songs. I can certainly say I love my job; I like doing what I do!

MN: I understand that *Black Mambazo*

is basically members of your family and one other family. Do they all want to stay as part of this group?

JS: We always promise each other that we'll continue on singing together. The first time I assembled a group, I just took people who had nice singing voices; but they failed to sing. Finally I chose people who like to sing; these guys really do like to sing!

KL: Do you have a musical rapport with people like Miriam Makeba [a female black South African singer known in the USA for some 30 years]?

JS: Oh, yes. There are many people who like to work together with *Black Mambazo*, even in South Africa, and here. We recently made a record with a lady from Brazil, although we just sang one song with her. There are many who like to work with us, and we like to work with other people too.

DB: Because of the door you opened, there's more interest in hearing South African music here now and more willingness to accept it. There's quite a lot coming out; some of it, like Johnny Clegg and his band *Savuka*, is achieving success. From the big pool of talent, who do you think will be the next international star? I'd like your opinion about what's coming out of South Africa these days.

JS: There's the women's group *Mahotella Queens* and *Mahlatini*; he's well-known now. Then there are the

people who just play guitars; there are several of them. There are lots of very good musicians; I hope people here get a chance to hear them.

MN: Do the social circumstances of your country affect your music at all? Only a couple of your pieces mention anything political. Do political attitudes or events ever keep you from performing or cause you other problems?

JS: So far, we've had no problems. I think maybe the government didn't know us. In South Africa, we were a group that was just playing for blacks; white people only started to know us after the Paul Simon records. Because we grew up on the farm, whites don't know us; we don't stay with them. We start to see them when we grow up, going away to work for one year and then going back home for three years. We're on the farm, not in places where people sit together with the whites and talk; we don't talk with them. I just started to practice English in 1987, when I joined Paul Simon. I didn't use English at home; I just stayed with black people, that's all.

DB: I was at the concert at Good Hope Center in Capetown last year, when you were there with *Stimela* [led by guitarist Chikapa "Ray" Phiri; he and some other members of the group also appear on *Graceland*]. There was a good white crowd there, considering...

JS: That was my first time playing to a

white audience. And you were there, eh? **DB:** That was a good show! Except there was a problem afterward: I'm sure you remember the riot [not a "riot" in the sense of "rowdy participants," rather, the South African police teargassing a large crowd of the concertgoers amassed outside the hall after the performance — a not uncommon police procedure when crowds gather in South Africa — followed by the scramble to escape]; I know I'll never forget it!

JS: Even those people who are politicians didn't know me then. Now they've started to know me; when I'm walking down the street, they recognize me and say, "Oh, *isicathamiya*'s so popular now!" Before that, they didn't know about us; they didn't care about this type of music. Our people at home were supporting us, and some people who liked indigenous things were supporting *Black Mambazo*. But now we started reaching out to each and everybody to come together and work with *Black Mambazo*. And *isicathamiya* is becoming very popular now.

MN: Well, let's hope that now that they've learned what good things you have to offer, they'll give you fuller rights of participation in the society.

JS: Yes! That's right! Thank you very much.

DB, KL, and MN: Thank you very much.

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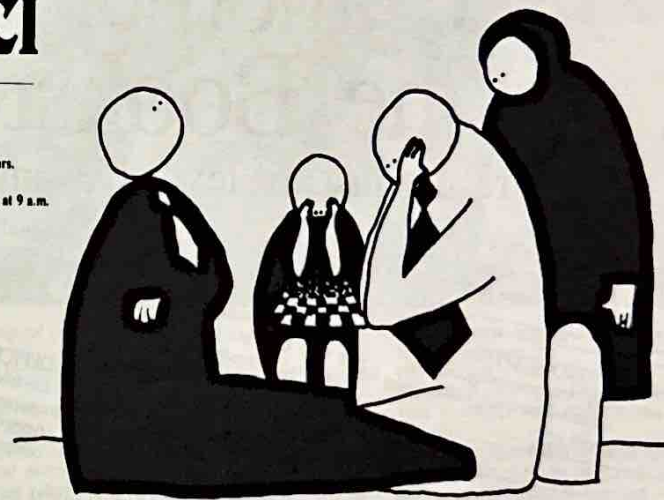
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THE VOLCANO SUNS YEARS

Peter Prescott, the founder and soul of Boston's Volcano Suns, formed the band after the breakup of Mission of Burma. Prescott had felt squelched in a band that already boasted two excellent songwriters in Clint Conley and Roger Miller; the Suns became a forum through which his songs could be performed. The band released three fine albums on Homestead Records: *The Bright Orange Years*, *All-Night Lotus Party*, and *Bumper Crop*. During this time, the band underwent numerous personnel changes; Prescott has been the only continual member. The most recent Volcano Suns album, *Farced*, is the first since the band left Homestead for SST Records. WHPK's Anthony Star talked to the Volcano Suns - Drummer vocalist Prescott, guitarist David Klielner, and bassist Bob Weston - after a recent concert.



AS: Your next album is coming out on SST.

PP: It's out now. It's been out for about a week.

AS: Why did you switch from Homestead to SST?

PP: Purely a distribution thing.

AS: It seems that Homestead bands have this curse of putting out great records that no one ever buys.

PP: That could be true. I think there have been like a million really great records on Homestead. They don't get enough of them in Europe or the West Coast, and SST does.

DK: Thus the move.

PP: Thus the move.

AS: The last time I saw you was at the Brattle Theater in Cambridge, MA...

PP: That was a weird one.

AS: That night, you had John Williams, and I saw you in New York with Chuck Hahn (Sorry). Now I find...

DK: I'll explain it. I was living in New York, and Pete was on some kind of weird hell weekend in New York, and he came to my house. He was really drunk, and he was crying, and he came up to my apartment. He said, "Dave, I don't know what to say; I don't feel good about the

band right now, nothing is working out — will you help me out?"

PP: (laughing) That's a great story.

DK: No, it's not true. Chuck wanted to stay in school, and couldn't take the serious...

PP: Chuck figured that he would have to leave the band to do his school thing. John was interested in rejoining — we ended up playing a lot of gigs in a short amount of time with John, some in Canada. We did an East Coast tour. John lived in Vermont, and we practiced,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

like, once, played a million times. It didn't really work out.

AS: I can imagine.

PP: So Chuck started to play again. Chuck played on the record, Dave played on the record, two other guitarists played on the record.

AS: On the new record?

PP: Yeah, it was definitely a free-for-all.

DK: Well, there are punk studio pros.

AS: So you think of yourselves as studio musicians — you bring in whichever guitarists you want?

PP: (moaning) Ideally. Ideally, that's a joke. It would be nice if this line-up stays.

AS: It would appear that if you want to be in a band in Boston, you have to be in the Volcano Suns first.

PP: It would appear that way, but it's really that people join when it's a good thing for everybody; then they leave when it's time to leave.

AS: So you think this lineup will last awhile?

PP: I hope that it lasts until the band stops.

AS: Have all these lineup changes affected the sound of the Volcano Suns very much?

DK: Well, the essence is still there.

AS: When John Williams was playing at the Brattle, it was a very scratchy sound. Tonight, the guitar was a lot fuller.

PP: Dave is fuller, and he's also more musical. John is very musical, but if a song has a melodic aspect and a noisy aspect, he always leans toward the noisy, and I like to sort of mix them up.

AS: That's what I really liked about Bumper Crop. There's a lot of really noisy stuff, then all of a sudden, a really melodic thing appears out of nowhere.

PP: That's a nice balance for us; that's what we like to hit. But it's not a popular balance — people like it either one way or another.

AS: Some people like grunge, some people like pop songs.

DK: We like it both ways.

AS: So you're on a mission to convince people that they can have it both ways.

PP: Let's be realistic.

DK: We're not going to convince anybody who isn't into it. I just figure that if people dig it, it's here to be dug.

AS: I've noticed that whenever you play, you are really into having a lot of stuff on stage. Tonight, you seemed to move away from the inflated spiders, over to lights instead. Does this mean anything? Have the spiders been retired?

DK: We have a pile of moldy blow-up plastic figures sitting in the practice space.

BW: It's pretty random — it's just like, throw a bunch of shit up there to make it seem more like a practice space.

PP: It's almost like a joke on a rock show. We don't have the money, and if we did, we probably wouldn't spend it on that stuff. It's all to make it look like a big mess — kind of like the music.

AS: It seems that the Volcano Suns aren't that serious — all the spiders on stage.

PP: It's serious.

AS: Serious musically. But you're not on a mission.

DK: We like to bring out the absurdity in rock music. These days, I think that the humor that was around when punk rock started isn't really there anymore.

PP: Music is dull. Music is way too fucking dull.

AS: So what bands can you stand?

PP: The bands that each of us can stand overlap, but there are a lot of bands that some of us like while the others don't. I like the Butthole Surfers and the Fall, and bands on our label, and on Homestead.

AS: Can you think of a few bands that all of you agree on?

DK: We all like Squirrel Bait — tonight we did a Squirrel Bait cover. We all like the Fall.

PP: I've got to confess. I've gotten heavily into 60's grungy shit, which I never did before. I'm just rediscovering it, and it's more fun than music I hear now.

AS: Is that going to affect your sound?

PP: There is some stuff on our new record — when you hear it, I think you'll see — that tries to go back further than the beginning of punk rock. That was a great time, but there was great stuff before then — you know, really weird stuff.

AS: Weirdness didn't start in 1977.

PP: Exactly. There's plenty of great weird shit way before then ...

DK: Stravinsky.

PP: ... that those guys dig too, speaking for you!

AS: Do you guys disagree?

DK: No, not at all. There's a lot of stuff out there. In terms of new stuff, there's not much new stuff that I like, but of current stuff, I like some of the New Zealand pop — I think some of those bands do real good things. And I'm into real heavy noisy bands. I think Sonic Youth is still doing real good stuff.

AS: Sonic Youth and Dinosaur are other bands that have gone from Homestead to SST.

BW: Dinosaur is really (garbled).

AS: What?

DK: Bob really likes Dinosaur.

PP: Sonic Youth and the Butthole Surfers are bands that we debate about. We all like them in various degrees. I'm really into the Surfers — I think David is more into Sonic Youth, but the Surfers fit my thing, just because they're such an absurd mess.

DK: But we are all into Bon Jovi.

(Agreement from all present.)

AS: I haven't heard the new record yet. I loved a lot of the last one; is the new one a masterpiece? Is it your goal to make a record that good? (laughter) Or would you not go quite that far?

PP: I don't think we can reach that high.

AS: Your hair is too short to feather.

PP: You have to reach for realistic goals. Bon Jovi-hood is out of our reach.

AS: That's probably good. (To DK)

Does it seem strange to have had various members of Sorry in the band?

DK: No, I think that it is really good. I think it is better that I am coming into this band after Chuck.

AS: Did you make any music between Sorry and ...

DK: No. For three years I did nothing.

AS: Chuck was in a band ...

PP: New Parts from Old.

DK: It was his little studio project.

AS: I've heard some of their songs on compilations. So you didn't do any music at all?

DK: I didn't do anything. I didn't do any music at all. I just went to school.

AS: Are you finished with school, or are you just taking time off?

DK: I'm sort of taking time off, but it's not like, "Oh, I'm taking time some time off to be in a band."

BW: So why are the shows so late in Chicago?

AS: I don't know. I've only lived here for two months.

PP: Have you lived in Boston before?

AS: Cambridge.

BW: Yeah, he went to, uh, ...

DK: Oh, you went to Commonwealth ...

BW: Lemonheads sweater punks ...

DK: ... so he's part of the sweater-punk movement.

AS: What is this "sweater punk" stuff?

BW: The Lemonheads are the godfathers of sweater punk.

AS: How do you mean that?

DK: Bands that went to private school, prep school, and, like, have their instruments ...

BW: Preppy punks.

DK: Evan Dando (Lemonheads, Blake Babies) is a preppy punk.

AS: Evan always had that preppy streak in him.

DK: And the Blake Babies have carried it on.

AS: Oh, God, yeah.

DK: Bullet LaVolta.

AS: But they're a little too ...

BW: They all went to Harvard!

DK: They all went to Harvard. They're preppy punks.

AS: But they are kind of nasty.

PP: This is where your whole definition breaks down.

DK: Well, it's not an aesthetic thing.

BW: It's not a musical thing.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

DK: It's a scene thing that has to do with Boston.

AS: I just can't imagine putting the Blake Babies and Bullet LaVolta in the same category.

PP: It's really a different universe.

DK: I think there is a connection, but I can't quite articulate it.

AS: OK, I'll give you some time.

DK: I'm working on it.

AS: Write a song for the next record.

DK: It will be a revelation.

AS: On the next record, I want to hear a song called "Sweater Punk" or something — like a ballad. Well, you went to the same high school (Brookline High School) as Michael Dukakis. Now, people like Sorry come out of there.

DK: The Dukakis kids, Andrea and Kara, went to school at the same time I did.

PP: Chuck has a story about one of the Dukakis kids.

AS: I've heard a few stories. I don't know if we can talk about these things now that the election is over ...

PP: Actually, it was an amazing bummer. I have never been involved in politics, and I got totally bummed out by

the way this whole thing went.

DK: We are worried about the Bush years.

PP: I thought he got screwed. Dukakis was a totally cool, totally dull person who should have been President.

AS: A friend of mine had this theory. If you looked at the last few years, the Red Sox, the Celtics, the Patriots, the Bruins — all went to their championships. Dukakis was going to become President, there were all these great Boston bands ... but now, Dukakis is defeated, Larry Bird is out for three months ...

PP: So I guess we're all on our way out.

AS: ... and there are rumors that Wade Boggs is going to be traded. Is Boston music the next to go?

DK: We're on SST now, and we're going to sell, like, 20 records.

PP: That was a frustrating thing, too. He (Dukakis) had a fucked-up campaign, but he was really the right man for the job. And I hope that people don't, like, just fucking give up for another four years. Like, "Oh, this slob is running this place, so we'll let him."

AS: So what civil liberties do you think you'll give up first?

PP: I'm not going to give up fucking anything. It's twisted, how apathetic people have gotten in eight years. It's amazing how apathetic they've gotten. They're like fucking totally asleep.

DK: We often draw parallels between

what's going on in music and whatnot, and what went on during the Reagan years.

PP: Oh, it's the same. Music has gone through a decline, like the political world.

AS: It seems that in the last few years, Boston has had a lot of good music.

PP: Yeah, there has been some stuff, (mockingly) Not like the good old days.

DK: I think we've got to cruise. Clark is standing there glaring.

AS: One last really weird thing. When I was trying to figure out your lineups, I noticed that you have had all these people with names spelled with "ei." This violates spelling rules. Is this some prerequisite for joining?

DK: That's great.

PP: Weigand, Kleier, ...

AS: Gary Waleik.

PP: Ah.

AS: This made me very suspicious. Do you change their names when they join? What's going on here?

DK: That's great.

AS: I was trying to figure out your lineup, and these letters were staring at me.

DK: That's a good way to answer when people ask why the lineup changes.

PP: There's always got to be someone with an "ei."

AS: You couldn't spell the names anymore, so you had to get someone new.

PP: Yeah.

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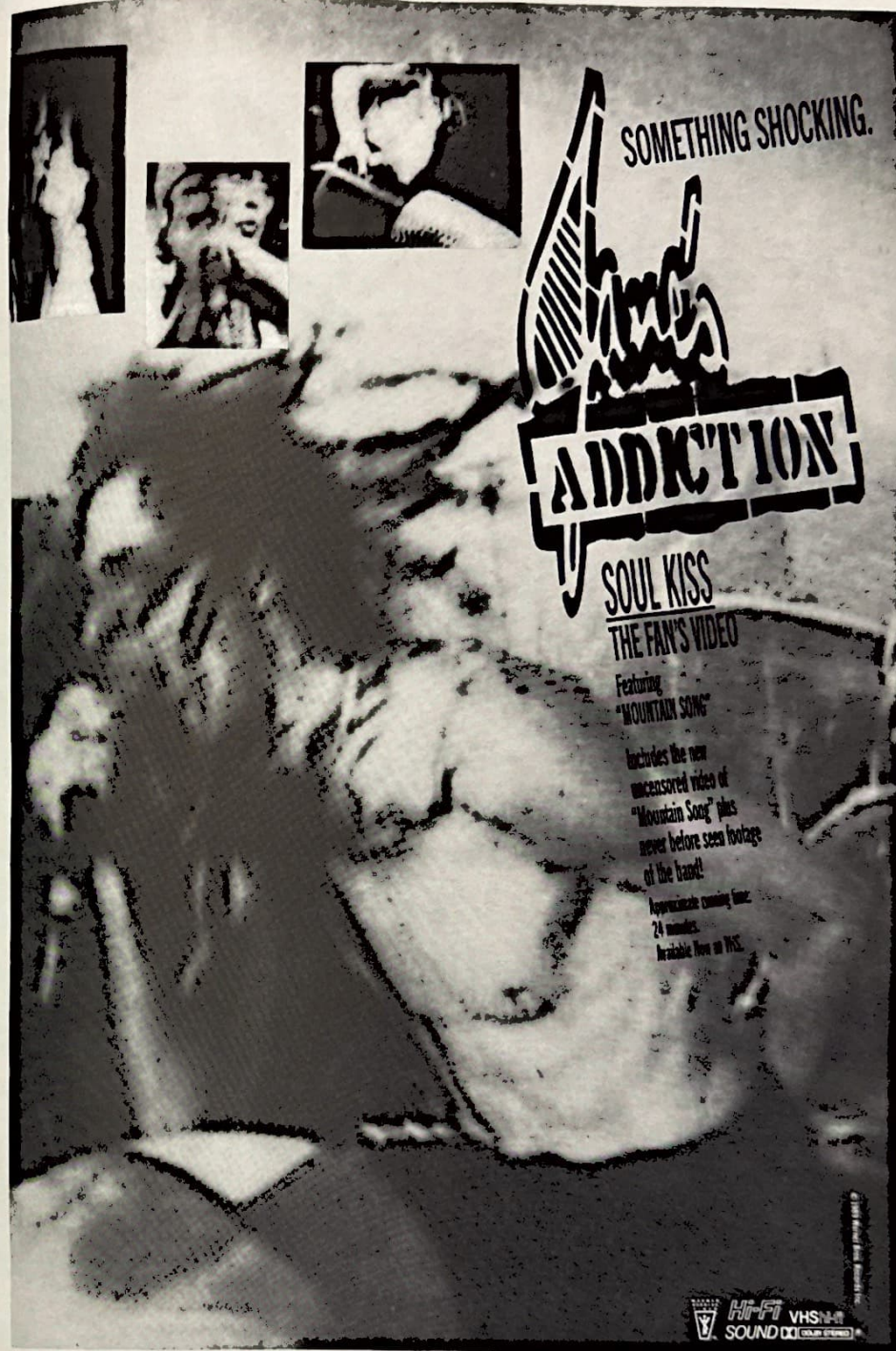
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